

# **Forestry Title of the Farm Bill**

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Mr. Chairman, my name is Michael Goergen; I am director of forest policy for the Society of American Foresters. I thank you for the opportunity to share the views of foresters and highlight the forestry community's commitment to a forestry title in the next Farm Bill.

The programs of the Farm Bill have the potential to reach the 9.9 million non-industrial private forest (NIPF) landowners in the United States, an underutilized resource to achieve forest sustainability in this nation. These individuals own approximately 363 million of the Nation's 747 million acres of forestland, accounting for almost half of the Nation's forests. That is larger than two times the size of the state of Texas. These forests provide important public benefits including wildlife habitat, clean water, recreational opportunities, open space, and other environmental benefits. Well-managed forests also improve forest health, help maintain soil and water quality, and provide important forest products. In fact, NIPF lands provided almost 60 percent of the Nation's timber harvest in 1996, and as timber harvests on the national forests continue to decline, the number of private landowners harvesting timber grows. Despite the importance of NIPF lands in the U.S., the full public benefit and private value of these lands are not being captured, as less than ten percent of NIPF landowners consult a professional forester prior to harvest. Landowners are making important business transactions that affect their bottom line, and the Public's environmental bottom line without using professional advice.

NIPF lands are the least intensively managed of any forest ownership category in the nation. On much of this land a timber sale is an unusual event in the owner's life; often in response to a personal situation such as a college education, retirement or other financial needs. If a landowner has a sound management plan, unusual events can usually be provided for within the context of that plan. Management plans enhance the investment in forestland, and can help the landowner achieve the full potential of that forest resource when they need it. Forest management is a long-term commitment that takes careful planning. As we have demonstrated, the vast majority of timber sales are without benefit of professional advice; with no plan for maintaining or regenerating a sustainable forest following harvest; and with little recognition of the environmental impacts of these activities. NIPF landowners need technical advice, and most are not even aware of this need.

Providing landowners with education, technical assistance and financial incentives works. For example a recent study in the state of West Virginia shows that Forest Stewardship Plans (authorized under the Farm Bill) are effective in influencing landowners. Landowners implement

activities, such as timber harvesting, stand improvement, grapevine removal, and wildlife habitat improvement more often when prescribed in stewardship plans. Research also shows a strong positive association between forester involvement in timber sales and compliance with West Virginia's Best Management Practices. However, landowners expressed dissatisfaction with the Forest Stewardship Program because they want more frequent visits from foresters, and more funding for implementing noncommercial forest stewardship activities. Studies indicate that landowners with Forest Stewardship Plans are three times more likely to implement those plans if they receive financial incentives or additional technical assistance. Landowners receiving this assistance are also more likely to manage their forests for timber, wildlife and water quality, and are more likely to adopt multiple resource management practices, and to try new and innovative practices. If landowners know what is possible with their forests, and can find the funds to implement a forester's advice, they want to do the right thing for the land. The Farm Bill can make those opportunities available.

### **Sustainable Forestry**

The Society of American Foresters holds sustainability of forest resources as a core value. Sustainability means meeting environmental, economic and community aspirations simultaneously. It requires the development and protection of natural resources at a rate, and in a manner, that enables people to meet their needs while providing future generations with the means to do the same.

Since authorization of the forestry provisions of the Farm Bill in 1990, there have been significant changes in public and private attitudes on forest management including the promotion of "sustainable" forestry, forest certification and the dramatic shift in domestic supplies and international competition. State forestry agencies and commissions are being asked or mandated to take on greater environmental responsibilities and demonstrate progress in forest resource management. Additionally, financial incentives to convert forests to subdivisions and other developments are ever increasing, and are the major cause of losses in the forest land base. Communities have been more involved in forest management, and should be recognized as an active partner in state and private forestry programs.

NIPF landowners are essential to the sustainability of our Nation's forests and the Farm Bill provides a significant opportunity to help them realize their potential.

The SAF has several objectives we hope you will include in your Farm Bill Concept Paper or legislation:

1. a non-industrial private forest landowner cost-share incentive program that is based on the concepts of sustainable forest management and provides predictable and long-term funding through mandatory authorizations;
2. a Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative within the RREA;
3. the enhancement of existing conservation programs to include forestry activities;
4. programs designed to assist in fighting wildfire; and
5. a program to use hazardous fuels as biomass energy.

### **Sustainable Forestry Incentives Program**

The number one priority for SAF and most of the larger forestry community is the authorization of a cost-share program for forestry practices that provides incentives to non-industrial private forest landowners to implement forest management plans and provide significant public benefits. We believe this new program should combine elements of the **Forest Incentives Program (FIP)** (§1214) and the **Stewardship Incentives Program (SIP)** (§1216) into the **Sustainable Forestry Incentives Program**. This new program would provide financial, technical, and education assistance to NIPF landowners to encourage the long-term sustainability of NIPF lands by assisting these landowners to more actively manage their lands for public benefits. Your Concept Paper shows mandatory funding for this program at \$10 million per year for 10 years, this is truly recognition from this Committee that forestry is an important aspect of conservation and a key aspect of sustainable development. We recognize that the Committee could not fund our full request for \$150 million per year, and hope that there may be additional funding added to the mandatory aspect of the program. Regardless of any additional funding, we truly wish to thank the Committee for including forestry.

We believe mandatory funding for the program is necessary for the **Sustainable Forestry Incentives Program** for several reasons. Forestry is a long-term commitment. While timber is the nation's second most valuable agricultural crop behind corn, most forest landowners do not harvest timber annually. Landowners need to make long-term investments, and the state agencies administering these programs will need to be assured of stable long-term funding. Secondly, forests provide critical public benefits like water quality, wildlife habitat, and valuable green space. A ten-year incentive program funded through significant mandatory funding will ensure those public benefits and many others. We have to maintain forests as forests, and this program, with stable funding, can help. Finally, studies have shown that landowners are two to three times more likely to implement practices when cost-share funding is provided. **SAF, and the forestry community, believe that mandatory funding is essential to create a stable, predictable and positive investment climate for sustainable forest management.**

The objectives of the **Sustainable Forestry Incentives Program** are to invest in practices to establish, restore, protect, manage, maintain, and enhance the health and productivity of the nation's non-industrial private forests for timber, wildlife habitat, water quality and wetlands, providing significant public benefits. This program will ensure that sustainable forest management practices occur where needed to enhance and sustain the long-term productivity of timber and non-timber forest resources. This includes reducing the risks of wildfire and helping restore and mitigate the damages to forests caused by fire, insects and disease. The program must be complementary to efforts to provide educational outreach on sustainable forestry, and offer technical assistance to landowners. The funds will leverage funding already provided by state forestry, private sector programs, and thousands of volunteer foresters.

The program would fund a broad array of conservation practices that landowners may not implement due to a lack of financial resources. These practices may include, but are not limited to; agroforestry practices such as shelterbelts and windbreaks; forest wetland and riparian area management; water quality and watershed protection and management; energy conservation and carbon sequestration; wildlife habitat enhancement; invasive species management; forest fire risk reduction and recovery; forest management planning; and actions that promote sustainable

timber production. State stewardship committees in collaboration with the state forestry agencies provide direction and determine practices eligible for federal funding, and the state forestry agencies will implement the program. As envisioned, the program would be administered by the Department of Agriculture and implemented through state forestry agencies that have the delivery structure already in place, a strong cadre of private forestry consultants should supplement this effort.

The key differences from past forestry cost share programs and this new program will be a commitment to sustainability (including economic, ecological and social concerns), and an integrated delivery mechanism combining financial assistance, technical assistance and educational outreach to implement these conservation practices.

### **Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative**

SAF proposes a new program entitled the **Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative** to conduct a targeted campaign to educate forest landowners about:

- A. the value and benefits of practicing sustainable forestry;
- B. the importance of professional forestry advice in achieving their sustainable forestry objectives; and
- C. the variety of public and private sector resources available to assist them in planning for and practicing sustainable forestry.

The outreach effort would be funded through USDA CSREES (Extension) and implemented with the assistance of the SAF, members of the SAF, the State Foresters, consulting foresters, and University partners. A major thrust of the Initiative would be the reauthorization and expansion of the Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA). RREA addresses critical forestry and related natural resources extension and stewardship needs in states, and also the critical issues of forest management for productivity and environmental quality on non-federal lands. The SAF supports this program, which helps in communicating ecologically sound technical advice to landowners, foresters, and loggers. This advice improves the productivity, management and long-term sustainability of non-industrial private forests. The program funds extension efforts that are a model of partnership between the USDA and State Universities and Land Grant Colleges. We know there are substantial unmet needs of non-industrial private forest landowners, and RREA is one piece of the solution. We ask Congress to reauthorize and expand the program at a funding level of \$45 million per year.

Research studies show that less than ten percent of landowners receive professional forestry advice before harvest. Most landowners have a range of objectives, with timber production usually subordinate to other considerations such as recreation and aesthetics. Many landowners do not have management plans in place, and when they decide to harvest they often receive less value for their timber than if they had advice from a professional forester. Frequent results from unplanned harvests include land that could have been left in better condition, values other than timber may be significantly diminished, and reduced environmental compliance. Many of these problems are avoided when landowners receive professional forestry advice.

A second major emphasis within RREA should be the **Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative**, a program that would enable CSREES and NGO's to leverage public, NGO, and private sector programs aimed at educating landowners on the need for forestry advice and expertise. There are many programs designed at giving advice to landowners. Excellent examples include, but are not limited to, the SAF's Certified Forester Program, the Tree Farm System, the Association of Consulting Foresters, the Forest Stewardship Program, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, the Forest Stewardship Council, Green Tag Forestry, the National Network of Forest Practitioners, the Communities Committee, and a host of others. We believe landowners could truly benefit from knowing what available programs provide and being able to select one that best meets their needs. Currently these efforts are fragmented, and yet they have similar goals: to improve forest management. As individual organizations we cannot reach all forest landowners, but with significant funding and combined resources we can truly make a significant impact. One-stop-shopping for landowners could truly benefit the overall objectives of these programs and sustainable forestry.

The goal would be to reach the greatest possible number of the 4.1 million individuals and families who own forested tracts larger than 10 acres. There will be specific emphasis on peer to peer learning and outreach. Additionally, the effort would promote the value of professional forestry advice, and the favorable economic and environmental results associated with that advice.

We believe the program's value would lie in its targeted approach to outreach, and delivery mechanism of extension foresters, university partners and professional foresters. A national source for one-stop-shopping would provide information from a broad array of public and private sector programs available for landowners interested in sustainable forestry. The effort will allow landowners to explore opportunities to improve the condition of their land and improve the value of their property and the proceeds of their management, provide public benefits via improved forest lands, all at minimal cost to the government because private sector dollars and programs are largely used to get the work done.

### **Enhance Existing Forestry Authorities**

Reauthorization of the 2002 Farm Bill provides us with an opportunity to update and enhance all forestry authorities affecting private lands. Our objective is to include sustainable forestry as a program objective, equal with wildlife habitat and other objectives in all forestry and conservation programs. This will simply provide forest landowners better management options when participating in the various conservation programs, as well as improved access to program benefits. We are asking that Congress recognize forestry as a significant tool that can be used to achieve conservation goals.

The Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (CFAA) is the base legislation for a variety of forestry related programs authorized and funded, in part, by the federal government. The 1990 Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act (the Farm Bill) added a Title XII, called the Forest Stewardship Assistance Act (Congress amended the CFAA with title XII.) Congress authorized programs like the Forest Stewardship Program, Forestry Incentives Program, Stewardship Incentives Program, Forest Legacy Program, and others through these titles. SAF

asks that Congress rename Title XII as the **Sustainable Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act**. This title change will reflect the forestry community's efforts to ensure that sustainable forestry is practiced everywhere in the United States. Additionally, several of the programs we are advocating are the basis for assuring sustainability, and that forest stay forested.

Although many of these programs are operating effectively, many could benefit from enhanced commitment to using trees and forests to meet program goals and objectives. SAF also encourages the Committee to update these programs to meet current demands, readdress goals and objectives, and adjust funding levels.

**Forest Stewardship Program (§ 1215)** – This program is functioning extremely well, providing technical forestry advice to 180,000 landowners covering 22 million acres of forest in the ten years since its inception. We believe Congress should build in flexibility in implementing the program and support substantial increases in appropriations. **Congress should modify the Forest Stewardship Program to express two main goals: building the capacity of state and local agencies to assist forest landowners in managing their forests sustainably, and allow programmatic delivery of technical assistance to meet the requirements of federal mandates, such as under the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act.**

**Forest Legacy Program (§ 1217)** – We support the Forest Legacy Program. The Legacy Program is achieving its objectives with excellent results. The only suggestion we might offer is to raise spending for the program, as new states continue to complete assessments and request federal funding.

**Urban and Community Forestry Assistance (§ 1219)** – We support the Urban and Community Forestry Assistance as it is an effective program and connects urban residents to the forested environment in addition to enhancing the urban environment with beneficial forest cover.

**International Forestry (§ 2405)** – The authorizations for international forestry programs at the Forest Service could emphasize the important role international forestry has on domestic forest management. We believe the Forest Service international forestry programs fill a critical need in assisting the State Department and others in understanding domestic forestry in a global context.

**Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** – Working through state technical committees, WHIP is designed to help landowners improve wildlife habitat. The program provides cost-share funding to develop habitat for upland wildlife, endangered species, fisheries, and other wildlife. **SAF would like to see more funding available to non-industrial forest landowners for developing habitat conservation plans under this program.**

**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** – It is important to SAF that CRP funds be invested in conservation practices that have the potential to last beyond the 10-year contract period. We believe that the use of long-term easements and increasing incentives for tree planting would enhance the public benefits of the CRP program. Therefore, **we recommend offering a 15-year or longer-term contract as an option for landowners.**

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** – EQIP is another program that could benefit from an enhanced commitment to using trees and forests to meet its objectives by including non-industrial private landowners with farmers and ranchers that benefit from the program.

**Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)** – This program continues to show promise in producing public benefits from private lands. There will be a need for continued investment, and expansion of the program to lands that are predominately forested. **All resource lands should be eligible, not just those with a cropping history.**

**Forestry Research focused on non-Federal lands** – We support the continuation and expansion of forestry related research programs, and stress the important role outreach and research play in sustainable forestry.

**The Cooperative Forestry (McIntire-Stennis) Research Program** – The Cooperative Forestry (McIntire-Stennis) Research Program supports long-term research on forestry and wood fiber conducted by the nation's public universities. University-based research is an important part of the collaborative forestry research effort involving federal, state, and private sector scientists. McIntire-Stennis research is critical to the development of new information and technologies that increase not only the efficiency and productivity of forest management on all forest ownerships for a wide range of forest benefits, but also provide information for developing natural resource management policy. McIntire-Stennis research funds are granted directly to public colleges and universities on a matching basis leveraging more than three state and university dollars for every federal dollar. We strongly support these efforts and ask that Congress increase authorized spending on the program.

## **Wildfire**

**Community and Private Land Fire Assistance** – The Farm Bill provided the authorizations for the State and Volunteer Fire Assistance Programs, though those authorizations have technical expired. We believe these program should be reauthorized and enhanced to enhance community protection from wildfire by authorizing federal agencies to coordinate with local communities, to conduct fuels management on the ground to prevent catastrophic fires, and to train local communities to be ready to assist in fire fighting.

We have seen a dramatic increase over the past few decades in the severity and intensity of wildland fires, as a strong result of past fire and land management policies. These wildfires threaten not only the nation's forested resource, but the thousands of communities intermingled in the wildland-urban interface. We find that the collaborative National Fire Plan developed in response to the 2000 fire season is the proper, coordinated and most effective means to address this wildfire issue. However, the National Fire Plan is but a first step. Although adequate authorities exist to tackle the wildfire issues at the landscape level on federal lands, strong authority to act on most private lands where the largest threat to life and property lies is lacking.

Building upon the success of the Community and Private Lands Fire Assistance account established in last year's Interior Appropriations bill, we propose the establishment of a

Community and Private Lands Fire Assistance program. This program would enable the Secretary of Agriculture to manage trees, forests, and watersheds directly on the National Forest System and indirectly, in cooperation with State Foresters or the equivalent state official, on other lands in the United States, to: (1) aid in wildfire prevention and control; (2) protect communities from wildfire threats; (3) enhance the growth and maintenance of trees, forests that promotes overall forest health; and (4) ensure the continued production of all forest resources including timber, outdoor recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, clean water and more through conservation of forest cover on watersheds, shelterbelts, and windbreaks.

The purpose of the program would be to: (a) focus the federal role in promoting optimal firefighting efficiency at the Federal, state and local levels; (b) augment federal projects that establish landscape level protection from wildfires; (c) expand outreach and education programs to homeowners and communities about fire prevention; and (d) establish defensible space around private landowners homes and property.

All of this would take shape on the ground through:

1. fuel hazard mitigation and prevention; *(Increase incentives for communities and private landowners to address defensible space and fuel management needs on municipal and private property. Treatments should include prescribed fire, mechanical removal, mulching, and application of chemicals where appropriate.)*
2. invasive species management; *(undertake cross-boundary projects to address buildup of non-native species affecting fuel loadings)*
3. multi-resource wildfire planning; *(promote optimal firefighting efficiency at Federal, state, and local levels through coordinated prepositioning, response and post-fire restoration)*
4. community protection planning; *(promote and coordinate community prevention and response to wildfire threats such as FEMA's PROJECT IMPACT)*
5. community and landowner education enterprises including FIREWISE *(expand outreach and education programs to homeowners and communities about fire prevention through use of programs such as FIREWISE)*
6. market development and expansion; *(markets must exist in order for private enterprise and communities to become self-sustaining)*
7. improved wood utilization; *(the same logic about self-sustaining applies to wood utilization)* and
8. special restoration projects. *(these can include fence reconstruction, tree planting, etc... to help recover from wildfire damage).*

SAF has worked in conjunction with state officials involved in wildland fire fighting to develop this section. **We fear that unless more enhanced and focused efforts are not put forth to address wildfire threats on private lands, our efforts through the National Fire Plan will only get a portion of the job done.**



## **Hazardous Fuels Reduction**

The SAF would also like to acknowledge and support the use of the heavy hazardous fuel loads that are being removed under the National Fire Plan on federal and private lands, and other catastrophic wildfire reduction efforts as a renewable energy source.

Reducing hazardous fuels from our all our nation's forests will not only help prevent catastrophic wildfires, but can also serve as a means of energy production. Authorizing grants to biomass energy facilities and communities so they can afford to buy the hazardous fuels from the woods solves the problem of what to do with the fuels that need to be removed under the fire plan; it also helps ease energy demands. Essential to this task will be the establishment of a contracting tool to ensure a consistent and predictable supply. Additionally, SAF recommends authorizing stewardship contracts to remove hazardous fuels on 5 to 10 year intervals that can be used as biomass for energy generation. Not only will this provide a missing component to the National Fire Plan, utilization, but it will also positively contribute to meeting the increasing demand for energy.

## **Conclusion**

SAF would like to thank the Committee for this opportunity to provide input into reauthorization of the Farm Bill. It has been an honor to work with the larger forestry community in developing aspects of my testimony. Our number one priority for the new Farm Bill is the development of a non-industrial private forest landowner cost-share incentive program that is based on the concepts of sustainable forest management and is provided predictable and stable funding through mandatory authorizations. We also believe the establishment of a Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative and the enhancement of existing forestry authorities will help ensure forest sustainability. Additionally we believe there is a need for authorities to formalize Community and Private Lands Fire Assistance and the establishment of a biomass program that will have the dual benefit of reducing the hazardous fuels risk on our nation's forests while simultaneously providing a renewable source of energy.